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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KIRKUK 000021

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SUBJECT: (SBU) KURDISTAN ISLAMIC UNION TALKS THE TALK

REF: 05 KIRKUK 272

CLASSIFIED BY: RBELL, PRC, PRC, DOS.

REASON: 1.4 (d)

11. (SBU) INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY: On January 29, RC, DRC and IPAO met Abdulrahman Siddiq Karim, the smooth-talking head of public affairs for the Kurdistan Islamic Union. Abdulrahman was upbeat on the KRG investigation into the Dahuk incidents in which several KIU members were killed, including the top candidate on its parliamentary list for Dahuk (reftel). The KIU thinks it deserves three ministries in the unified KRG. Karim compared the KIU to European Christian Democratic conservative parties and insisted it was committed to democracy and the rights of women. Abdulrahman's protestations to the contrary, the experience of a secular Kurd contact of this office raises doubts as to the KIU's commitment to democracy. END INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY.

(SBU) KIU: WE BELIEVE IN DEMOCRACY, WOMEN'S RIGHTS

12. (C) Abdulrahman Karim said:

-- The commission that KRG President Barzani mandated has begun its investigation into the Dahuk attacks, where Karim said six buildings were burned. The commission, which includes a KIU member, has visited the site and interviewed survivors. The KRG-E PM has already promised compensation for the 24 cars destroyed. (Comment: Abdulrahman did not play the outraged victim; he implied that both sides had been at fault. He went to great lengths to portray the KIU as completely non-violent, stressing that it had never had a militia or armed wing. End Comment.)

-- The KIU should get a share of the ministries in the unified Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in proportion to its share of Kurdistan National Assembly (KNA) seats, i.e., their nine KNA seats should give them three ministers, since the Kurdistan Islamic Group was getting a ministry on the strength of 6 KNA seats and Communists were getting a ministry with two KNA seats.

-- A KIU delegation is in Baghdad negotiating for a role in the national government, on the basis of the five seats in the Council of Representatives that it won in the December elections.

-- The KIU's motto is "freedom, brotherhood and justice." Comparing it to the Christian Democratic parties of Europe, he said the KIU is an Islamic democratic party. Although the KIU began as an offshoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, its beliefs have changed from pan-Islamism to Islam in each state (or in this case, Iraqi Kurdistan). Also, armed jihad is

reserved only for governments to prosecute, not individuals.

-- The KIU is committed to democracy and the rights of women. We will leave it to God to punish individuals for violations of divine law, such as women who refuse to wear the hijab. Women can visit our office without wearing it. People should not doubt our commitment to the rule of law. Some day we may take "Islamic" out of our name. My preference would be to call ourselves the "Kurdistan Constitutional Party" to emphasize this commitment.

-- People fear us because they associate us unfairly with al Qaeda and "holy war." This hurts us, as the people seek to avoid both secular and Islamic extremism.

(SBU) SECULAR KURD ON KIU: DON'T BELIEVE THEM

¶3. (C) A contrasting view of the KIU was given by a close Kurdish contact of the REO who said:

-- After his brother died, he assisted in taking care of his sister-in-law and her children.

-- His sister-in-law approached the local KIU office to take advantage of the KIU's offer of aid to the poor.

-- The KIU agreed to help her and her children but the women of the household had to start wearing the hijab and the children had to attend daily classes at the local KIU mosque in return for the assistance.

-- When he found out about this, our contact was furious and told his sister-in-law that if she did not cut ties with the KIU, he would throw her out of the house. His threat was

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successful and that was the end of her affiliation with the KIU.

(U) COMMENT

¶4. (C) The KIU is the leading opposition party in the Kurdish Region. It gets much of its support from voters fed up with the two main parties' failure to curb corruption, democratize and become more responsive to their constituents' wishes. Although Karim made the right noises, we had the impression he was protesting too much.

¶5. (U) Bio Note: Abdulrahman Siddiq Karim speaks and understands a good amount of English. He said he was the Iraqi Minister of Environment under the CPA.
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